Introduction

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Introduction

In public discourse, it has been argued that since the mid-20th century, human activities have become increasingly isolated, and collectivism has diminished, particularly in Western democracies. The heightening of individualism and trends of neoliberal governance have been associated with a greater sense of insecurity, which brings along aspects of social change, including strengthened ideas of self-sufficiency in which people are increasingly obligated to take care of each other, with decreasing support from public welfare services. A counterargument to this development arises from research that demonstrates how countries with an extensive public contribution to welfare produce an improved range of well-being for their citizens compared to societies with the opposite approach. Arguments to address growing inequalities underpin the importance of looking for collective rather than individual solutions because populations identified as being most at risk of social exclusion are losing collectivist services but are less likely to meet their needs individually (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).

However, some aspects of the neoliberal venture may inadvertently provide opportunities for rebalancing the power relations between citizens and professionals. For example, the aim to emphasise individual expertise, in its most constructive sense, may be seen as a threat to ascribed experts' authority to define human needs. Whilst this may raise objections among professionals and undermine conventional concepts of expertise, it offers the potential for experiential knowledge to be treated as expert knowledge (i.e. experts by experience of living with a health or social care situation) and considered equally alongside professional knowledge (Ruch *et al.* 2010). This debate may therefore encourage professionals to consider ever more carefully how they could interact with people so they feel that they have been heard.

Although the concept of reciprocity is used in a variety of disciplines, such as economics, moral philosophy, psychiatry and religious studies, as well as the social sciences – especially anthropology – sociology, psychology and social psychology, it has yet to be explored theoretically and practically in relation to its implications for social work and social policy practices. In this book, we aim to further the understanding of the concept in the

social sciences in general and in social policy and social work specifically by developing a robust empirical and theoretical analysis of reciprocity. Contributing authors from different countries and areas of practice offer us a variety of ways to understand reciprocity, both in theory and in practice.

People's own interpretations of their well-being are the starting point for social work and social policy (Jordan 2007). Pierre Bourdieu (2000, p. 19) brings up an important observation on being human: 'existence humaine'. When a person seeks the meaning of life, it is of prime importance that he or she exists for others. An individual's sense of participation and their opportunities to share and participate in activities or groups that are important to them are considered to be crucial factors in human well-being. Therefore, an important aspect that underpins the book is illustrating how reciprocity is built collectively, even though an individual person is seen as a subject capable of action and agency. Through the analysis of reciprocity, we are shedding light on how most challenges, which may be discussed as the individual's problems, are, in fact, mostly connected to other people, communities and welfare systems.

The main themes and objectives

Our key aim is to illuminate collective and shared action between all the key stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of social policy and social work and social care practices as well as those doing research and educating professionals by discussing and addressing key practice themes, such as:

- What unique benefits does reciprocity offer to service users and professionals?
- What can we learn from service users' own collective actions in the community?
- Is reciprocity in general possible, given the hierarchical relationships in social work and social policy?
- Has professionalism distanced itself from the lives and experiences of service users – should practitioner and service user relationships be reframed?
- Do we need a new kind of professionalism, informed by reciprocity – something more caring?

In debating these questions, the authors will reinforce their ethos that learning from and enabling reciprocity is about enhancing and reframing social policy and social work; it is not about developing substitutes for services. Meeting the objectives will produce knowledge about how to work with and to feed reciprocity and care for one another, both informally and in the care sector.

This book embraces theoretical, empirical and discursive chapters, which at both a methodological and practical level will help in defining the goals,

practices and limits to politicians' and practitioners' actions in welfare policy work and in better supporting the initiatives of service users themselves. Although the emphasis of the book is on exploring Western democracies, the authors represent different societal backgrounds, including the United Kingdom, Austria, Finland, Canada and the United States, and will draw on literature and data from a number of other countries, adding to the book varying elements of how reciprocity is understood and practised.

The book is structured into three subsections, drawing on discursive and empirical examples to illustrate the relevance of reciprocity to the development of policy and practice. We now present a summary of each section, followed by the chapter content as described by the authors:

Part I: Reciprocity: theoretical conceptualisations

The aim of this section is to reach out and to generate discussions around the concept of *reciprocity* in order to enhance our understanding of it as a potentially universally recognised phenomenon. Research into reciprocity can be seen as a contribution to international social welfare research in which the attention is focussed on well-being and the communities that hold people together (see Becker 1990, Bruni 2008, Ostrom and Walker 2003). We share the idea that the personal experience of social and societal reciprocity has profound ontological significance for an individual, and it is one of the most important factors in creating well-being. In order to have a full understanding of how well-being can be created and supported from a citizen-oriented point of view, we need a thorough theoretical analysis of how experiences of reciprocity are generated. By analysing reciprocity theoretically, we wish to clarify the meaning of collective and shared action and further develop the understanding of the concept in the social sciences, especially in social work and social policy.

Antti Karisto (Finland): Reciprocity and well-being

This chapter explores the role that social and societal reciprocity have in creating well-being. A confusing factor, however, is that there are several competing discourses on well-being in the public domain, and the significance of reciprocity varies between them. The chapter starts by discussing this conceptual confusion. Then, it clarifies the role of reciprocity in the creation of well-being by concentrating on the following topics: human relationships and everyday social intercourse, care and intergenerational relations.

Maritta Törrönen (Finland): Creating well-being through reciprocal relationships

This chapter discusses reciprocity in connection to well-being and welfare. The underlying idea suggests that reciprocal relations take place between individuals, communities and even societies. Well-being and also welfare in these relations can be depicted as dependent on how equally resources are shared, how people are respected and what kind of real possibilities people

have to choose. These questions are framed by practical, symbolic and moral dimensions of reciprocity. They clarify the importance of people's social commitments and the need to transfer from individualistic services to empowerment at a community level.

Bernhard Babic (Austria): Reciprocity and normativity in social work: a complex relationship based on the Capability Approach

Starting with some basic considerations on reciprocity, this chapter reminds us of the fact that social work inevitably needs a guiding conception of what should be realised in this sphere of activity. To illustrate this in more detail, the Capability Approach and its understanding of well-being will be introduced as a normative framework, and some consequences of its operationalisation for social work will be addressed. Against this background, it becomes clear that the meaning and the informative value of reciprocity for social work cannot be assessed adequately without reflecting the respective normative orientation of this field of work.

Part II: Reciprocity in practice and community settings

This section starts by exploring the importance of reciprocal relations in groups of citizens facing similar adverse life, health or social situations. The first two chapters in this section shed some light on the core features of the reciprocal acts of both giving and receiving in group settings. The chapters will highlight the ways in which peer relationships improve and enhance group members' well-being, mobilise alternative identities and senses of normalcy, and identify distinct challenges around duty and obligation. At a wider contextual level, these chapters illustrate the importance, in social work practice and policy, of understanding and recognising the unique roles of peer relationships, groups and networks in the welfare landscape.

The next two chapters in this section focus on enablers and barriers of reciprocity in child welfare environments. Reciprocity is about mutuality and exchange, but often, social work settings, particularly in residential and family environments are characterised by hierarchical power relationships in which risk assessment predominates. A discourse of risk reinforces hierarchies of responsibility and capability, focusses on 'safety' and cuts across the central, relational role of helping people to grow and develop. The potential for reciprocity in the face of unequal power (or otherwise) is also illustrated by discussions in this section, which look at the potential for reciprocity between social workers and their service users.

Carol Munn-Giddings and Thomasina Borkman (United Kingdom and United States): Reciprocity in peer-led mutual aid groups in the community: implications for social policy and social work practices

This chapter explores one of the fastest-growing forms of community-based social support networks: mutual aid groups (MAGs) led and run by people

with direct lived experience of the same health or social situations. Three unique forms of reciprocal relations are illuminated: the process of the 'sharing circle', in which peers share their experiences and listen to those of their peers; the organisational aspects of the sharing circle; and the network of specialised relationships that evolve around it. The chapter concludes with what has been learnt from this form of reciprocity and collective citizen agency.

Laura Tarkiainen (Finland): Revisions to client and professional self-categorisations during reciprocal support groups among the long-term unemployed in Finland

This chapter focusses on professionally led support groups in which alternative and revised client and professional self-categorisations may be experimented with and re-crafted. It is argued that reciprocal helping processes can mobilise alternative self-categorisations through which social work can assist its clients in reshaping and distancing themselves from culturally stigmatised categorisations used in a variety of welfare landscapes. The chapter utilises interview data from clients' and professionals' experiences in support groups that aimed to enhance the daily well-being of long-term unemployed clients in Finland. The analysis focusses on revised client and professional self-categorisations. As a result of an analysis, five categories were identified: *active life changer*, *supporter*, *equally encountered*, *professionally grown* and *bystander*.

Claire Cameron (United Kingdom): Risk and reciprocity in residential care: some problems with a universal norm

In this chapter, the potential for reciprocal relationships in children's residential care is discussed through analysis of interview data examining perspectives on professional-child relationships in Denmark, Flanders, Germany and England. Four types of relationship are examined before discussing the discourse of risk in residential care settings. Reciprocity, as characterised by mutual exchange as the foundation for sustaining meaningful and reparative relationships, was referred to less often than more instrumental purposes of relationships. The articulation of risk and risk assessments acted as a further barrier to developing reciprocity in the responses from English residential care homes. Axel Honneth's (1995) concept of recognition, as extended to include young people's participation, is suggested as a more promising way forward than reciprocity for conceptualising relationships in residential care.

Riitta Vornanen and Pirjo Pölkki (Finland): Reciprocity and relationship-based approach in child welfare

Reciprocity as a concept has not been widely discussed in child welfare research. This chapter concentrates on reciprocity from the perspective of a relationship-based approach. Reciprocity may offer a way to understand and focus on the relationships, engagement and power between the social

worker, the parents and the children. The core of the concept is in the nature and quality of the relationships between the parents and their children. Social workers may need to intervene in these sensitive and private family relationships, and the foundation of the work rests on how these relationships are understood. The developmental origins of reciprocity need to be known in order to understand children's growth relative to the reciprocal and secure relationships. Child welfare social work entails working with and within relationships. The concept of reciprocity strengthens the understanding of the meaning of relations and the importance of belonging and recognition in child welfare.

Part III: Reciprocity: methodological and educational issues

The final section explores the importance of reciprocity and complementary participatory methods in both research and educational practices – activities that underpin the development of social work policy and practices. The chapters highlight how the integration of bidirectionality, mutual caring, reciprocity and meaningful relationships into social work can contribute to effective and reflective methods. The chapters in this section cover a range of settings and issues that, again, tackle the potential for reciprocity in seemingly hierarchical relations between researchers and the people they research; between co-researcher teams involving adults, children and young people; and between graduate social work students and their advisors in contexts in which rigour, indicators of individual achievement and evaluation of outcomes prevail.

Tuula Heinonen (Canada): Reciprocity with graduate students fostered through creativity

This chapter focusses on reciprocity in graduate student-advisor relationships that occur in a context of academic guidance and mentorship introduced through a reflexive, shared process. Nicola Simmons and Shauna Daley (2013), who view the creative process as the highest level of thinking, provided the impetus for an introduction of a mixed media exercise in which students created drawings and short narratives to express their impressions about their year's works. In return, the author produced for students a response art piece (Fish 2008), which led to shared insights and more effective and enhanced advisor-student relationships.

Eveliina Heino and Minna Veistilä (Finland): Narrative reflection as a reciprocal method

This chapter focusses on the reciprocal elements of narrative reflection in interview-based research. The authors define reciprocal elements as parts of narrative reflection that promote feelings of fair treatment between researchers and interviewees. The study data consist of 25 initial and 9 follow-up interviews among families with a Russian background living in Finland. The analysis focusses on the structure of the interviews and the

interactions between researchers and interviewees. As a result of this study, three reciprocal elements are identified: *creating a shared understanding*, *participation* and *recognition*.

Niamh O´Brien, Tina Moules and Carol Munn-Giddings (United Kingdom): Negotiating the research space between young people and adults in a PAR study exploring school bullying

This chapter explores the process of evaluating the individual and collective view of participation in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project carried out by an adult researcher and five young researchers. The PAR framework allowed for a commitment to continuous information sharing, reflection and action. The process of evaluating participation on three occasions empowered the team to reflect on the reciprocal relationships that developed between the adult and the young researchers. The study acknowledges participation as fluid and dynamic. Furthermore, recognising that power can be shared between adult and young researchers is crucial to the development of reciprocal relationships in research.

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